

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 VIENTI 00942 01 OF 03 171107Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----171117Z 111561 /12
R 171000Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8232
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 VIENTIANE 0942

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PBOR MASS MMOL PINS LA VM UR TH US
SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEW OF VIETNAMESE AND SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITY
IN LPDR

REF: A VIENTIANE 0056, B VIENTIANE 0676, C VIENTIANE 0827,
D VIENTIANE 0798, E VIENTIANE 0934

SUMMARY: A FRENCH DIPLOMAT JUNE 14 PROVIDED US WITH
"CURRENT" FRENCH OB ON VIETNAMESE IN LAOS AND REPORTS
OF SOVIET ACTIVITY IN SOUTHERN LAOS. THE DIPLOMAT SAID
THAT A VIETNAMESE VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
RECENTLY TOLD THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO THE SRV THAT
THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 50,000 VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN
LAOS. THE DIPLOMAT ALSO SAID THAT THE VIETNAMESE
MISSION IN LAOS IS STATIC DEFENSE OF MAJOR ROADS,
TOWNS, AND THE THAI-LAO BORDER. HE DETAILED PAVN
POSITIONS AND TROOP STRENGTH AND REPORTED VIETNAMESE
USE OF CAPTURED U.S. MILITARY EQUIPMENT IN SAVANNAKHET.
HE DESCRIBED SOVIET ACTIVITY IN LAOS AS SHIFTING FROM
THE XIENG KHOUANG AREA, WHERE THEIR WORK IS LARGELY
COMPLETED, TO SOUTHERN LAOS WHERE THEY ARE CONSTRUCT-
ING RADAR SITES. THE DIPLOMAT PROVIDED THE LOCATIONS
OF POSSIBLE MISSILE SITES AND LOCATIONS OF RECENT

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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00942 01 OF 03 171107Z

VIETNAMESE SETTLEMENT IN LAOS. HE ALSO OFFERED WHAT
HE IDENTIFIED AS A FRENCH ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGIC
OBJECTIVES OF VIETNAM AND THE SOVIET UNION IN LAOS.

END SUMMARY.

1. A FRENCH DIPLOMAT INFORMED US THAT A VICE MINISTER

IN THE SRV MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RECENTLY TOLD THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO THE SRV THAT THERE WERE 50,000 PAVN TROOPS IN LAOS. THE DIPLOMAT ALSO SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OF PAVN TROOP STRENGTH DURING THE PERIOD MARCH-MAY, 1977. VIETNAMESE UNITS HAVE REPORTEDLY TAKEN UP STATIC DEFENSE POSITIONS ALONG MAJOR ROADS AND IN MAJOR TOWNS IN LAOS AND ALONG THE LAO-THAI BORDER. THEY ARE REPORTEDLY ASSUMING PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING DEFENSIVE POSITIONS WHILE THE LPLA ASSUMES PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEALING WITH DOMESTIC INSURGENTS. VIETNAMESE UNITS REPORTEDLY STILL ARE USED TO COMBAT HMONG RESISTANCE IN THE VANG VIENG AREA. THE DIPLOMAT OFFERED THE FOLLOWING PROVINCE BREAKDOWN OF VIETNAMESE AND SOVIET ACTIVITY IN LAOS.

2. XIENG KHOUANG: IN XIENG KHOUANG THERE IS A TOTAL OF TWO REGIMENTS OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS: THERE IS ONE PAVN INFANTRY BATTALION WITH ATTACHED ARTILLERY AND ARMORED UNITS (THE ARMORED UNITS UNCLUDE TANKS). THERE IS A PAVN ENGINEERING UNIT ASSIGNED TO WORK AT PHONSAVANH AND XIENG KHOUANG AIRPORTS AND TO ASSIST SOVIET TECHNICIANS WHO HAVE BEEN INSTALLING RADAR SITES IN THE AREA. THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT ADDED THAT THE FRENCH BELIEVE THERE ARE SURFACE TO AIR MISSILE POSITIONS IN XIENG KHOUANG. HE SAID THAT THERE ARE TWO PAVN BATTALIONS IN EASTERN XIENG KHOUANG AT BAN BAN (UG4972) AND NONG HET (UG9455) AND TWO IN A FORMER ROYAL LAO POLICE CAMP AT MOUNG KHEUNG (BAN PHANG
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00942 01 OF 03 171107Z

TG8264). VIETNAMESE TROOPS MAN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ALONG ROUTE 7 FROM THE PDJ TO PHOU KHOUN (TG3151). HE SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF SOVIET TECHNICIANS WHO HAD BEEN STATIONED IN XIENG KHOUANG HAD BEEN REDUCED FROM APPROXIMATELY 200 TO APPROXIMATELY 20 FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF THEIR WORK THERE. MOST OF THESE TECHNICIANS HAVE NOW BEEN RELOCATED TO SOUTHERN LAOS (SEE BELOW).

3. SAYABOURY/LOUANG NAM THA: THERE ARE ONE OR TWO PAVN BATTALIONS IN SAYABOURY AND A MAJOR TRAINING CAMP/COMMAND BASE FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND (STAFFED BY VIETNAMESE AND LAO AS WELL AS THAI CADRE) AT (VIC QA5280), AND ANOTHER TRAINING CAMP FOR COMMUNIST THAI AT NAM THA.

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00942 02 OF 03 171136Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 VIENTIANE 0942

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4. VIENTIANE: VIETNAMESE TROOPS ARE LOCATED AT VARIOUS FORMER ROYAL LAO POLICE CAMPS, SPECIFICALLY AT KILOMETERS 21, 23 AND 27 ON ROUTE 13 TO PAKSANE, AND AT KILOMETER 12 ON ROUTE 13 TO LOUANG PRABANG. THERE IS A PAVN BATTALION AT BAN NONG THA (TE4791) ASSIGNED THE DEFENSE OF KILOMETER 6 (RESIDENCE OF MUCH OF THE LPDR LEADERSHIP) AND SPECIFICALLY PROTECTION OF THE PERSON OF PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE. THERE ARE ALSO UNITS OF PAVN TROOPS AT BAN SAM KHE (TE5491) AND THA BOC (UF1032). VIETNAMESE TROOPS DEFEND ROUTE 13 IN THE VICINITY OF VANG VIENG FROM A BASE AT BAN SONE (TF5891).

5. KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE: PAVN TROOPS ARE LOCATED IN THE VICINITY OF PAKSANE, PAKADING, AND ALONG ROUTE 8 AT KAM KEUT (VF7120), LAK SAO (VF9711), AND NAPE (WF0924). VIETNAMESE UNITS ARE ALSO IN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ALONG A ROUTE STRETCHING FROM LAK SAO TO MAHAXAI (WE2125), WITH BASES AT MAHAXAI AND AT BAN NHOMMARATH KEO (WE1748). PAVN OCCUPY POSITIONS ALONG ROUTE 13 STRETCHING FROM THA BOC (ABOVE) TO THAKHEK, WITH A BASE AT HIN BOUN (VE5945). THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT MAHAXAI (ABOVE) IS THE PRIMARY CENTER FOR DIRECTION OF THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THAILAND.

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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00942 02 OF 03 171136Z

AT MAHAXAI THE MAJORITY OF THAI WHO FLED THAILAND AFTER THE OCTOBER COUP HAVE RECEIVED MILITARY AND POLITICAL TRAINING. HE SAID THAT SOME SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT MAHAXAI IS THE SITE OF A TRANSMITTER

FOR PROPAGANDA BROADCASTS TO THAILAND, BUT THAT THIS IS "NOT CONFIRMED". A SMALLER CAMP FOR COMMUNIST THAI OFFERING COMMANDO TRAINING BY PAVN ELEMENTS IS AT KAM KEUT (ABOVE).

6. SAVANNAKHET: THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT IN SAVANNAKHET TOWN THERE WAS ONE PAVN UNIT (COMPRISING TWO COMPANIES OF TROOPS) WHICH WAS EQUIPPED WITH 15 U.S. MADE APC'S, PRESUMABLY CAPTURED U.S. MILITARY EQUIPMENT BROUGHT INTO LAOS FROM VIETNAM. HE SAID THAT THERE WAS A TOTAL OF FOURTEEN "JET PROPELLED" U.S. MADE RIVERINE CRAFT AT SAVANNAKHET. HE SAID THAT THEY HAD ARRIVED IN SAVANNAKHET FROM VIETNAM DURING MAY, 1977 IN GROUPS OF FIVE, SEVEN AND TWO AND THAT THEY HAD BECOME OPERATIONAL ("PLACED IN THE WATER") ON JUNE 1, UNDER VIETNAMESE CONTROL. PAVN UNITS ARE REPORTEDLY STATIONED ALONG ROUTE 13 FROM THE SE BANG FAI TO THE SE BANG HIENG. HE SAID THAT THERE ARE A TOTAL OF THREE PAVN BATTALIONS WITH TROOPS AT MOUANG PHINE, MOUANG PHALANE, DONG HENE AND SENO ALONG ROUTE 9. HE SAID THAT DONG HENE WAS THE PROBABLE SITE OF SURFACE TO AIR MISSILES THAT HAVE BEEN IN THE REGION FOR BETWEEN ONE AND ONE HALF YEARS. PAVN TROOPS AT SENO COMPRISE A TANK BATTALION. A BASE FOR TRAINING OF COMMUNIST THAI IS REPORTEDLY LOCATED AT MUONG NONG (XD6009).

7. SOUTHERN LAOS: THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT THERE IS ONE PAVN BATTALION EQUIPPED WITH SIX HEAVY TANKS AND TWELVE APC'S AT PAKSE TOWN. THERE IS A PAVN BATTALION AT PHU HIN KHONG (XB0985), ALSO THE SITE OF A RADAR UNIT INSTALLED BY SOVIET TECHNICIANS. THERE
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00942 02 OF 03 171136Z

ARE TWO PAVN PLATOONS IN KHONG SEDONE EQUIPPED WITH EIGHT TANKS. PAVN UNITS ARE LOCATED ACROSS THE MEKONG IN CHAMPASSAK PROVINCE AT PHOUNE THONG (WB7169) AND AT BAN VANG TAOU (WB5676). VIETNAMESE UNITS ARE ASSIGNED TO KEEP OPEN THE SECTION OF ROUTE 13 STRETCHING FROM PAKSE TO KINAK (VIC WA 9753) NEAR THE LAO-CAMBODIAN BORDER. THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT NOTED THAT THE AREA BETWEEN KHONG SEDONE AND KINAK WAS LARGELY UNDER THE CONTROL OF INSURGENTS LED BY FORMER FAR COLONEL BOUA LIEN AND ANOTHER COMMANDER NAMED THIT ANH. IN SARAVANE PROVINCE A PAVN UNIT IS LOCATED AT NONG BOUA (XC6534) AND A PAVN BATTALION IS LOCATED IN ATTOPEU. AT DONG QUANG TOUNG (VIC WA 5590) THERE IS A "VERY WELL-EQUIPPED" VIETNAMESE BASE FOR TRAINING COMMUNIST THAI. ANOTHER BASE FOR TRAINING COMMUNIST THAI IS AT LAO NGAM (XC2610) IN SARAVANE.

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00942 03 OF 03 171200Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 VIENTIANE 0942

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8. PAVN POSITIONS ALONG MEKONG: THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT THE VIETNAMESE APPEARED TO BE ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH AT LEAST PARTIAL CONTROL OF THE MEKONG WITH INAUGURATION OF THE RIVERINE FORCE OF FOURTEEN CRAFT AT SAVANNAKHET (ABOVE) AND PAVN UNIT POSITIONING AT SOP MANG (VIC UF 1428), BOUNG QUANG (VE1987), HIN BOUN (VE5945) AND KENG KABAO (VD7359).

9. AREAS OF VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN SETTLEMENT: THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT IDENTIFIED TWO AREAS OF LAOS AS HAVING RECEIVED SUBSTANTIAL VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN SETTLEMENT TOTALING ABOUT 4,000 SINCE MID-1976: 1) ALONG ROUTE 7 IN XIENG KHOUANG PROVINCE FROM NONG HET TO THE EDGE OF THE PLAIN OF JARS, AND 2) ALONG AND TO THE NORTH OF ROUTE 9 IN SAVANNAKHET, FROM THE VICINITY OF LAO BAO (XD7037) TO A POINT APPROXIMATELY 80 KILOMETERS INSIDE LAO TERRITORY. HE SAID THAT VIETNAMESE SETTLING ALONG ROUTE 7 WERE PRINCIPALLY FROM NGHE AN (NOW PART OF NGHE TINH) AND ALONG ROUTE 9, FROM THE SECTION OF BINH TRI THIEN THAT WAS FOREMERLY QUANG BINH AND QUANG TRI.

10. SOVIET ACTIVITY IN SOUTHERN LAOS: THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT TWO LARGE HELICOPTERS DAILY CARRY APPROXIMATELY TWENTY SOVIET TECHNICIANS FROM PAKSE TO
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00942 03 OF 03 171200Z

PHOU KATE (XC6226), WHERE THE SOVIETS BEGAN INSTALLING A RADAR UNIT ON APPROXIMATELY MAY 15, 1977. SOVIET TECHNICIANS ARE ALSO INSTALLING A RADAR UNIT AT PHU BATIANE (WB 9277) AND AT PHOU HINE KHONG (XB0985).

11. THE FRENCH DIPLOMAT SAID THAT HE HAD SEVERAL SOURCES FOR THE ABOVE AND THAT THEY WERE HIGHLY PLACED AND RELIABLE.

12. HE CONCLUDED THAT THERE WERE TWO REASONS FOR HEAVY VIETNAMESE AND SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN LAOS:
1) HANOI AND MOSCOW ARE AWARE THAT THE LPDR IS INCAPABLE OF DEALING WITH INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS WITHOUT VIETNAMESE ASSISTANCE, AND 2) THE VIETNAMESE AND SOVIETS ARE "METHODICALLY PREPARING FOR ACTION AGAINST THAILAND (FOR) SEVERAL YEARS IN THE FUTURE."

13. COMMENT: REPORT OF CAPTURED U.S. EQUIPMENT BROUGHT IN FROM VIETNAM BY THE PAVN FOR THEIR USE IN LAOS IS THE FIRST KSUCH REPORT WE HAVE HEARD.

14. IF THE PAVN HAVE IN FACT ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEFENSE OF THE LAO BORDER WITH THAILAND, THE CHRONIC TENSION AND CLASHES ALONG THIS BORDER COULD IN THE FUTURE LEAD TO THAI-VIETNAMESE CONFRONTATIONS.

15. WE DO NOT HAVE THE VOLUME OF OB ON PAVN FORCES IN LAOS TO ENABLE US TO FULLY EVALUATE THE ABOVE FRENCH REPORTS THOUGH SOME EMBASSY REPORTING TENDS TO CONFIRM THE PRESENCE OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS: ALONG ROUTE 13 IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE AND AT DONG HENE (REF A); ALONG ROUTE 13 NORTH AND EAST OF VIENTIANE AND IN SAYABOURY (REF B); IN NORTHERN VIENTIANE PROVINCE (REF C); AND IN THE VICINITY OF VIENTIANE INCLUDING BAN SAM KHE (REF D). WE WOULD APPRECIATE EVALUATION OF THE ABOVE BY ANY ADDRESSEES.

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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00942 03 OF 03 171200Z

16. THE REPORT OF VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN SETTLEMENT ALONG THE EASTERN END OF ROUTE 9 IS INTERESTING IN LIGHT OF THE APPARENT BORDER REALIGNMENT IN THAT AREA REPORTED REF E WHEREIN VIETNAM APPEARS TO HAVE INCORPORATED LAO TERRITORY.

17. RECOMMENDATION: THAT DEPARTMENT REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO CINCPAC, CIA AND DIA.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
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